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ABSTRACT

Intensive Reading Instructional Teams is a laboratory project for third graders and for some fourth graders who have difficulty in reading. It features a carefully individualized, eclectic approach made possible by low student/teacher ratios and by a wide variety of materials and equipment. The unique features of this program are the use of an intensive, three-hour session every morning for ten weeks and a team approach to instruction. This brochure describes the program's approach and requirements in terms of instruction, management/communication, personnel, materials/equipment, facilities, and costs. Criteria to consider in adopting the program and a timetable for getting started are also outlined. (AA)

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Intensive Reading Instructional Teams

Analysis and Selection Kit

CS 002 887

2

Intensive Reading Instructional Teams

IRIT is a project for third, and some fourth, graders who are having difficulty in reading. Students leave their regular classrooms to participate.

Students	Students are nominated for IRIT by their regular classroom teachers and principals on the basis of test scores and teacher judgment. Final selection is made by IRIT teachers.
Staff	IRIT staff consists of a half-time project director and half-time secretary, three teachers per team, and a team secretary. One member of the team is designated leader.
Student/Staff Ratio	Each team member teaches 15 students per period. One team can serve 135 students per year.
Facilities	Three separate classrooms and an office are required for each team. Office space in the district office building is required for the project director and secretary.
Instruction	IRIT uses an eclectic, individualized approach in its three reading areas--decoding, vocabulary and comprehension, and individualized reading. IRIT teachers choose among a wide variety of methods and materials in designing instruction for each student.
Training	Team members receive two weeks' training before instruction begins, and semi-monthly in-service sessions once the project is under way.
Scheduling	Students spend three hours each morning during one of the three 10-week IRIT cycles. Three groups of 15 students rotate from one teacher to the next at one-hour intervals, so that every student spends one hour in each reading area. Teachers spend each afternoon developing and coordinating lesson plans.

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IRIT

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Intensive Reading Instructional Teams is one of six projects selected as unusually successful for teaching reading and/or mathematics to underachieving students in low-income areas. Project Information Packages including detailed guidelines for installing and operating these projects are available from the U.S. Office of Education to qualifying school districts.

In one corner of the gaily decorated classroom, two third graders are engaged in an animated word game. In the center of the room, another student leans earnestly across a low table, gesturing as she explains her book to the teacher. A dozen others work quietly at tables or learning machines.

The word ga[illegible] breaks up. The two students check their folders for their next assignments and go their separate ways.

Intensive Reading Instructional Teams

(IRIT)

Intensive Reading Instructional Teams is a laboratory project for third (some fourth) graders with difficulty in reading. It features a carefully individualized, eclectic approach made possible by low student-teacher ratios and a wide variety of materials and equipment. The unique features of IRIT are high intensity and a team approach to instruction.

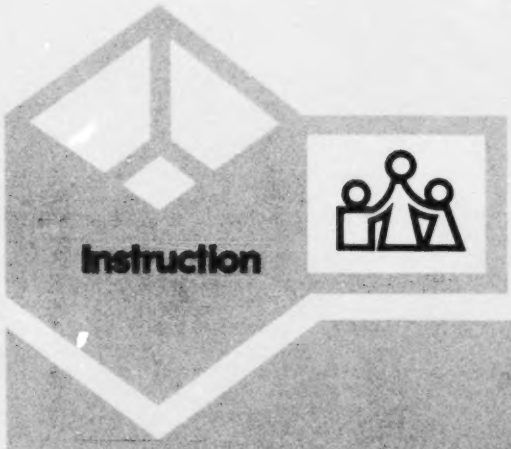
Students selected for IRIT report to the project rooms for an intensive, three-hour session every morning, five days a week for 10 weeks. The all-morning sessions immerse the students in reading and language learning, and also prove attractive to the regular classroom teacher. Since participating classes each send about 10 students to IRIT, the greatly reduced class size lets the regular teacher work closely with the remaining students for the 10 weeks that the IRIT students are gone. Of course the new skills and attitudes acquired by students in IRIT continue to simplify the teacher's job after the students return.

An IRIT team consists of three exceptionally skilled reading teachers, each with a separate classroom and each specializing in a different area of reading. The team handles 45 students in each of three 10-week cycles, 135 students per year.

Students are divided into three equal groups which move from teacher to teacher at hourly intervals. This means that each teacher must provide individualized instruction for all 45 students every morning. Not only must the instruction be individualized for each student, it must be carefully coordinated among the three teachers. This planning and teamwork is made possible by another unique IRIT feature: teams devote the entire afternoon to preparation, coordination, and professional development.

Project Origin

IRIT was developed by school personnel with ESEA Title I and state funds in Hartford, Connecticut, a generally prosperous city with large economically depressed areas. IRIT has been in operation there since 1965, and has recently been tried out in selected locations throughout the United States.


Instruction
• Teacher selects activities within subject area.
• Students move from activity to activity guided by folder.
• Individualized, eclectic instruction.
• Third (some fourth) graders.
• Three-hour periods for 10 weeks.
• Student-teacher ratio 15 to one.

IRIT provides supplementary instruction for third-grade students with problems in reading. Some fourth graders may be included at the discretion of the teams and the regular teachers.

IRIT uses an eclectic, individualized approach emphasizing personal attention, careful diagnosis, and a wide variety of learning methods and materials. The exact procedures followed with any single student are left largely to the IRIT teachers, although the project director monitors instruction and gives advice. Thus the teacher is the key to IRIT instruction, and the quality of the instruction rests largely on the talents of the teachers.

An IRIT team of three teachers works with 45 students at a time. The 45 students attend IRIT daily for one 10-week cycle, spending three hours per morning in the IRIT classrooms. The 45 students are divided into three heterogeneous groups of 15 students each, and they keep the same groups throughout the cycle. Each IRIT teacher has a separate classroom and concentrates on a different area of reading. The three groups of students rotate from one classroom to the next at hourly intervals, so that every student covers all three reading areas each day, and each teacher teaches all 45 students.

The three IRIT areas are decoding, vocabulary and comprehension, and individualized reading. The general approach to learning is similar in all three areas. Classrooms are warm, gaily decorated learning centers filled with a wide variety of commercial and teacher-made materials, equipment, and games. The team conducts a thorough program of diagnostic testing at the beginning of the cycle, and teachers carefully monitor or retest students throughout the cycle, using materials appropriate to each reading area. Daily, individual records and lesson plans are kept for each student, and students quickly accept responsibility for following their lesson plans with a minimum of prompting. The teachers move from student to student, occasionally working with pairs or small groups. The atmosphere is free and warm but, at the same time, orderly and serious. Students with a history of failure become involved and successful in the IRIT program, and the improved self-image and work habits show up quickly in the regular classroom.

The three reading areas differ in terms of goals and materials. Decoding concentrates on basic phonics skills which are lacking in nearly all IRIT students. Much of the decoding instruction is really drill, but games, learning machines, and interesting materials make it attractive to the students.

These basic skills are useful only if practiced in context, and the vocabulary and comprehension room focuses on integrating the decoding skills into practical reading skills. Students use equipment, programmed materials, and learning games to expand their vocabulary and improve their ability to get the meaning out of complete sentences and paragraphs.

Freed from the need for skill-building drills, the individualized reading teacher focuses on building a desire to read. The room is filled with books and materials which are relevant and appealing to the students. Students select and read books that they like and discuss them with the teacher. They also take part in activities and games aimed at general language development.

IRIT procedures for selecting students play a key role in project success. Team teachers meet with sending teachers before each cycle to discuss the children nominated for IRIT and the materials that the sending teachers would like IRIT to emphasize. Final selection of students is made by the IRIT team on the basis of test scores and teacher recommendations.

The IRIT approach has been tried with children from first through sixth grade, but it has proved most effective with third graders. The instruction is probably too intense for most younger children.

CAUTION: If exceptionally skilled, creative reading teachers cannot be selected for the project, IRIT is not effective.

Management/
Communication
• Instructional and administrative leadership from project director.
• Project director visits teams weekly and conducts semi-monthly in-service training.
• Main contact between project and regular teachers at beginning and end of cycles.
• Teachers have afternoons for preparation.
• Demonstration center emphasis.

The IRIT management style falls halfway between supervising the teachers closely and giving them complete freedom. The project director provides administrative support and instructional leadership. The intensive, team approach provides the framework in which the teachers can work effectively. But the IRIT instruction itself is largely under the control of the IRIT teachers.

As instructional leader, the project director visits each team at least weekly (more often during the first year) offering suggestions and advice. He or she also serves as a resource person, keeping abreast of the latest techniques and materials and conducting regular in-service training sessions. These inputs are important to project success, but serve more to supplement the teachers' own ideas than to control their classroom activities.

As administrator, the IRIT project director is responsible for the usual planning, budgeting, troubleshooting, and personnel functions. Because the teachers are so important to the success of the project, hiring the right teachers is one of the director's most important tasks. Once they are hired, the project director must make sure that they have the material resources, the preparation time, and the level of morale that they need to teach effectively.

The project director must arrange for good classroom space and get the funds to equip the rooms well. Teachers play the major role in selecting materials, and each team controls its own yearly materials budget. In addition, teachers are expected to create many special-purpose materials on their own.

There is no time in a normal teacher's day to individualize instruction for 45 students, prepare materials, coordinate with the other team members, and participate in frequent in-service training sessions. IRIT teachers are given all afternoon to accomplish these tasks, with full pay but free from teaching responsibilities.

IRIT demands extra effort from the teachers, so morale must be high. The delicate balance between project director supervision and team independence is a critical management factor in maintaining good morale. In addition, regular project-wide in-service training meetings and daily cooperation within each team provide IRIT teachers with mutual support and help keep morale high.

IRIT must operate as a cohesive project. Teams may be housed in regular school classrooms, but all team teachers are responsible to a single IRIT project director in the district office rather than to the school principal. This special status is required to ensure selection of highly qualified teachers and to maintain close communication within the project.

One member of each team is designated as "team leader" by the project director and serves as team spokesman, providing liaison with the project director and the regular school staff. The team leader may help with in-service training or take on other special duties, but does not supervise the other team members.

Within a team the organization is democratic, with each teacher responsible for his or her own reading area. Even though classrooms are separate, however, teachers must work together closely in the afternoons to coordinate instruction for all students.

The approval and close cooperation of the schools is critical to project success. IRIT teachers view the project as a service to the regular classroom teachers, and IRIT has formal procedures for including the classroom teacher in the selection of students and learning materials. IRIT also serves as an active demonstration center for local teachers and outside educators, and involves teachers and parents in a variety of activities, such as open house and graduation ceremonies.

CAUTION: Heavy-handed supervision by the project director wastes the talents of the IRIT teachers and destroys morale.

CAUTION: Failure to involve the regular classroom teachers undermines support for the project, and IRIT cannot survive.

IRiT: ESTIMATING COSTS [1]
(One Team, 135 Students)

	Number	Estimated Total Cost to Project
ANNUAL COSTS		
Personnel		
Project Director [2]	.5	_____
Secretary to Project Director [2]	.5	_____
Lead Teacher	1.0	_____
Team Teachers	2.0	_____
Team Secretary	1.0	_____
Facilities [3]		
Project Director's Office	1	_____
Team Office	1	_____
Classrooms	3	_____
Materials/Equipment		1,500.00
Other		
Transportation of students (if required)		_____
Total Estimated Annual Cost		_____
ADDITIONAL START-UP COSTS		
Personnel		
Project Director (March-August, 50% time)		_____
Lead Teacher (August, full-time)		_____
Training Stipends for Teachers (two weeks)		_____
Materials/Equipment		6,000.00
Total Estimated Additional Start-Up Cost		_____

[1] See page 9 of the Project Selection Guide.

[2] If this salary would not be charged to project funds, enter zero.

[3] Space may be available within the district at no cost to project.

IRIT ORGANIZATION

- Administrative personnel
  Project director and secretary (half-time)

- Teams
  Team leader
  Two team teachers
  Secretary

- 135 students (or to three schools) each year per team

IRIT requires a half-time project director (with half-time secretarial support) and one or more teams of three teachers. One member of each team is designated as "team leader." Ideally, each team has a full-time secretary.

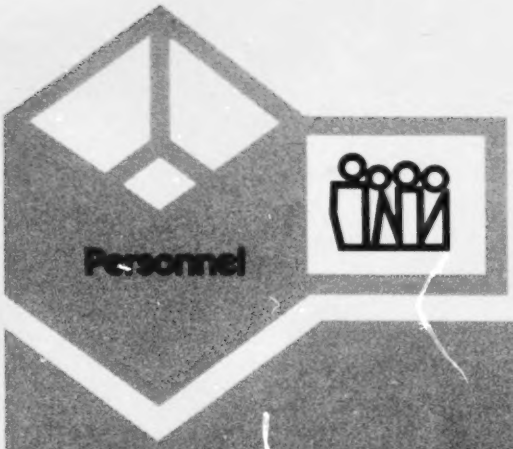
It is advisable to begin the project with only one or two teams, since planning and implementing a new project place a heavy load on the project director during the first year. As project operation becomes more routine, the director will be able to devote time to the additional training and coordination required by a larger number of teams. In the originating district, a half-time director manages four teams.

Each team teaches 45 students in each of three 10-week cycles, so that in a year one team can serve a total of 135 students. Experience has shown that 15 students at a time is about the maximum that one IRIT teacher can handle. Teachers would like even smaller groups, but project costs would rise accordingly.

In most cases, each IRIT team serves more than one school per year. The team may be housed in one of the schools it serves or in a separate building. However, housing a team in a separate building increases transportation problems and costs and isolates the IRIT teachers from the sending school staff.

Typically, a team serves students from its home school for one or two cycles and transports students from other schools for the remaining cycles. Where necessary, two schools may send students to a single cycle, but the logistics become more complicated as the number of sending schools per cycle is increased.

CAUTION: Attempting to serve many schools simultaneously with one team leads to scheduling and transportation problems.



Personnel

The project director:

- is a capable administrator at the district level.
- is an expert reading teacher.
- can hire unusually capable project teachers.
- maintains the enthusiasm of project staff.
- can provide instructional leadership to the project.
- works half-time.

Team leaders:

- are certified reading specialists or consultants within the district.
- communicate with the project director, school staff, and parents.
- coordinate team activities.

Teachers:

- are well respected in the district as exceptionally skilled teachers of reading.
- have at least two years' experience in the district.
- can work effectively as a team.
- are original and creative in developing specialized reading materials.
- instruct 15 students per session.
- manage a materials budget.

Team secretary:

- helps with record keeping and producing materials.

The IRIT staff is composed of a half-time project director and three teachers per team, one of whom is designated team leader. The project director is assisted by a half-time secretary, and a full-time secretary is required for each team.

The success of IRIT depends heavily on the caliber of the project personnel. The project director must be a dynamic but sensitive administrator, and an expert in teaching reading. Teachers must be expert reading teachers and must be able to work well in a team.

IRIT Project Director

IRIT demands a highly skilled and dynamic project director who is an able administrator and who is respected in the district as an expert in teaching reading.

The project director's first task is to gain the cooperation of school principals and teachers in arranging for space, adapting schedules, setting up lines of authority and communication, and making initial arrangements for student selection. These negotiations must be handled with authority and diplomacy if the project is to achieve the necessary support in the district.

The project director must also hire the highly skilled teachers required for the project and must command their professional respect. He or she must have the self-assurance required to give teachers a great deal of independence, and the tact required to provide the support and supervision necessary for effective instruction.

Maintaining close communication and good relations with non-project personnel is a continuing administrative responsibility. The project director serves as a mediator between project demands and the needs of the home and sending school staffs and as a clearinghouse for information on IRIT techniques and materials.

Most parent contact is coordinated by the teams, but the project director supervises parent involvement and handles any difficulties that arise between parents and project teachers.

Other administrative tasks include review of teacher performance, review of materials orders, control of the project budget, and project evaluation.

Instructional skills include training and consulting. During the two-week start-up training workshop, the project director trains the teachers in IRIT philosophy and procedures and helps them learn to use the materials that he or she has ordered. Through weekly visits and semi-monthly in-service sessions, the project director serves as a resource for new ideas and makes suggestions on strategies and materials to team members.

CAUTION: A project director who has the necessary reading expertise may want to control instruction and may be unwilling to allow enough autonomy to attract and hold the capable teachers required.

IRIT Team Leaders

The position of team leader is more of an administrative convenience than a delegation of formal authority, since all of the IRIT teachers are highly qualified and able to operate independently. However, team leaders have qualifications in addition to those required of the other two team members. They should be certified reading specialists or consultants who are capable of coordinating team activities and providing professional leadership. They should also have the interpersonal skill and diplomacy required to serve as a communicator between the teams and nonproject personnel. The team is not technically under the authority of the home school, and it is essential for the team leader to communicate frequently with the principal if good relations are to be maintained.

As additional teams are added, the team leaders' role becomes increasingly important, especially in organizing communication between the project director and team members.

CAUTION: Team leaders do not supervise team teachers.

CAUTION: Failure to designate a team leader usually suggests excessive involvement by the project director.

IRIT Teachers

Exceptionally skilled and dedicated teachers are needed to fulfill the unusual demands made by IRIT. Each teacher is expected to individualize instruction for 45 students each day and coordinate this instruction with the other team members and sending teachers. This means that teachers must have sufficient expertise and professional independence to diagnose needs and apply current instructional approaches to their own special reading area with little supervision.

The highly individualized nature of IRIT requires teachers that are original and creative in developing specialized reading materials. Each team member must also be a conscientious record keeper and lesson planner. Individual lesson plans and progress records for all 45 students must be constantly kept up to date and be available for inspection by visitors.

IRIT teachers have a warm personality and are able to develop a close personal relationship with the project children. Since many of the students will have a background of failure, the teacher needs to be able to improve self-concepts by providing a supportive atmosphere and by reinforcing student success. The ethnic and racial mixture of the typical project student population requires teachers who respect all cultures.

To find such teachers, the originating project director requires that candidates have at least two years' experience in the district and are respected as excellent teachers of reading. Their classrooms must demonstrate their talent for creating original teaching materials, and they must welcome the IRIT role as a demonstration teacher.

IRIT Team Secretary

Each team requires secretarial help for the production of teacher-made materials and the extensive record keeping. A full-time secretary for each team with experience in these areas is highly desirable.

- A wide variety of commercial and teacher-made materials keyed to each skill.
- A materials budget under the control of each team.
- Core materials and equipment available for start-up workshop in August.

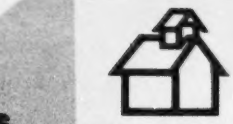
Each of the three IRIT classrooms is provided with a wide variety of highly motivational materials and equipment. A core of commercial materials described in the PIP is common to all teams, but each teacher is expected continually to develop original materials tailored to the needs of individual students. Filmstrips, records, games, typewriters, workbooks, basal readers, reading kits, and a variety of books for individual reading are used in the project. Decoding and Vocabulary/Comprehension materials and criterion-referenced tests also facilitate instruction.

About $7,500 provides the recommended core equipment and materials for one team. The amount varies depending upon the quantity of recommended materials already present in the district. The project director orders the core materials in the spring so that they will be available for training in August.

Once the project is under way, each team has its own materials budget and decides how funds are to be spent. The project director's role then becomes one of making suggestions and recommendations and approving orders submitted by the teams.

CAUTION: Project directors may be reluctant to give teams control of the materials budget.

CAUTION: Delays in ordering commercial core materials can mean the failure of one or more project cycles.



Facilities

- **Three separate, attractively decorated classrooms for each team.**
- **Furnished with brightly painted tables and chairs.**
- **An office for the team and team secretary located near the classrooms.**
- **Fully furnished office space in the district office building for the project director and secretary.**

IRIT's warm, brightly decorated learning centers are essential to project success. They offer an attractive contrast to regular classrooms and help generate the sense of enthusiasm and vitality that characterizes the IRIT teachers and students.

The project director arranges for the three separate, preferably adjacent classrooms required for each team. The rooms are used full-time by IRIT. Classrooms are most appropriately located in a home school.

Teachers are responsible for arranging and decorating their individual classrooms. In fact, they are selected partially on the basis of the imagination and skill with which they decorated their regular classrooms. The rooms are furnished with tables and chairs that can be brightly painted or modified.

An office for the team and the team secretary should be located fairly close to the classrooms. Furnished and equipped office space for the project director and secretary is in the district office building. This location reinforces the director's position as administrator.

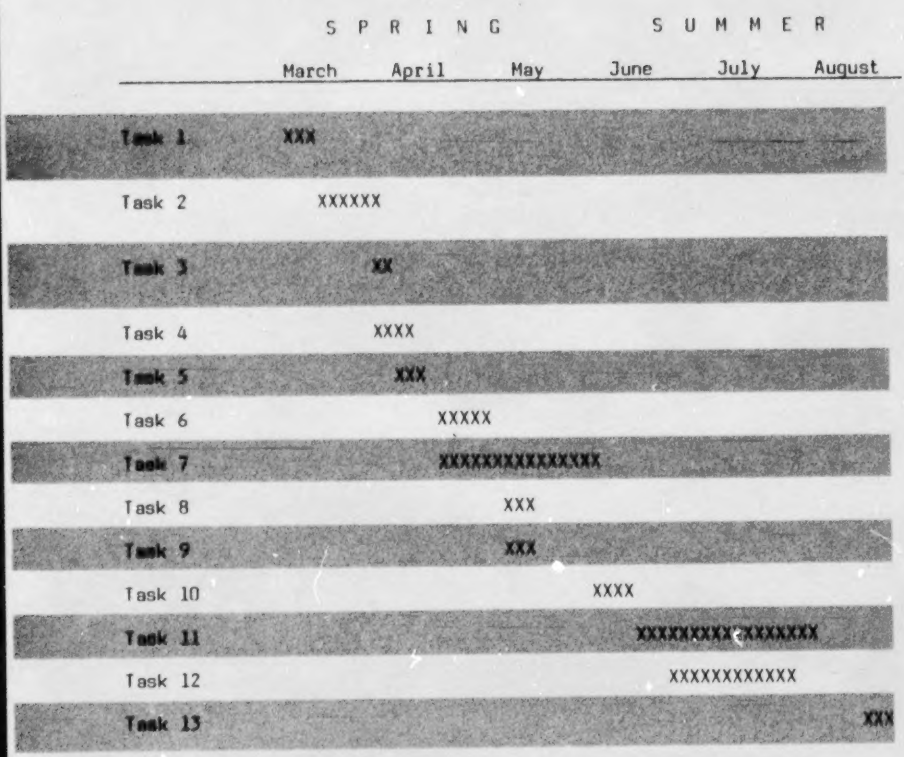
CAUTION: Three separate classrooms are required. Partitioning one large room has not proved satisfactory.

IRIT GETTING STARTED

If your district elects to implement IRIT, and your application for the PIP is approved, the project director will have many planning tasks to complete before training and instruction begin in the fall. The director's role is extremely important. The same person should carry out initial tasks and subsequent troubleshooting. He or she should start in March on a half-time basis to carry out the required start-up tasks within the time frame shown on the chart facing this page.

The project director:

1. begins work, secures office space, and familiarizes self with project.
2. orients personnel of tentatively identified home and sending schools and other relevant administrators in the district.
3. arranges with principals of home schools for space and confirms home and sending schools.
4. recruits and interviews prospective staff.
5. surveys materials and equipment.
6. orders necessary furniture, core materials, and equipment.
7. hires teachers (one team leader begins August 1).
8. hires external evaluator or designs project evaluation.
9. arranges for transportation if required.
10. makes arrangements for September student selection meeting.
11. sets up IRIT classrooms.
12. plans start-up training workshop and arranges for consultants.
13. conducts two-week start-up workshop for teachers.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21

IRIT

ADOPTION CRITERIA

INTENTION

Select IRIT only if your school district can meet the following project requirements:

INSTRUCTION

- Teacher selects activities within subject area.
- Students move from activity to activity guided by folder.
- Student-teacher ratio 15 to one.

MANAGEMENT/COMMUNICATION

- Instructional and administrative leadership from project director.
- Teachers have afternoons for preparation.
- Demonstration center emphasis.

ORGANIZATION

- Administrative personnel
  Project director and secretary (half-time)
- Team
  Team leader
  Two team teachers
  Secretary
- 135 students (one to three schools) each year per team.

IRIT

ADOPTION CRITERIA

CAPABILITY

Select IRIT only if

The following resources are available:

PERSONNEL

- Project director is a capable administrator and expert reading teacher.
- Project director can provide instructional leadership to the project.
- Team leaders are certified reading specialists or consultants within the district.
- Team leaders coordinate team activities.
- IRIT teachers are well respected in the district as exceptionally skilled teachers of reading.
- IRIT teachers are original and creative in developing specialized reading materials.
- Team secretary helps with record keeping and producing materials.

MATERIALS/EQUIPMENT

- A wide variety of commercial and teacher-made materials.
- A materials budget under the control of each team.
- Core materials available in August.

FACILITIES

- Three separate, attractively decorated classrooms for each team.
- An office for the team and team secretary located near the classrooms.

You can meet the schedule for getting started:

- Project director starts in March.
- First-year schools confirmed in April.
- Core materials/equipment ordered in April.
- Teachers hired in May.
- Two-week start-up training workshop in August.

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